

## Energy Efficiency and the State Building Code

Houses and commercial buildings waste more energy than any other human activity, including transportation. Energy efficiency is the most readily available form of energy we can tap into. When new construction is contemplated, a little foresight goes a long way: Good design can incorporate insulation, efficient doors and windows, passive solar gain, ventilation, and natural lighting; roofs can support solar photovoltaic collectors for electricity and solar hot water systems. All these features can be amortized over the life of the house or building, and initial up-front costs paid back many times from the energy saved. So why do some oppose building codes that would save energy and money for homeowners? Next week the Construction Industries Commission will hold hearings on rolling back the Building Energy Code passed in New Mexico last year.

The biggest reason for this attempted rollback is the retrograde thinking exemplified by the fossil fuel corporations and their adherents in the political world. Their agenda is transparently one of opposing any energy efficiencies in order to protect their oversized profits. They use such propaganda as, "Imposing any construction regulations that promote energy efficiency are anti-business." These so-called "friends of business," or "free-market" advocates, are anything but.

Despite their claims, the best approach -- over the long haul -- is to promote green construction practices, since the money saved can be recycled into the economy, rather than lost to wealthy energy-extraction corporations.

Let's look at the numbers:

The cost of constructing a building is, amazingly enough, only 30% of the lifetime costs of that building. An energy efficient house costs substantially less over the long-term than a standard house. What really counts for any homeowner is how much they spend in total each month for the costs of living in their house. So, it is not just the mortgage, tax, and insurance payments that affect their bottom line, but also what is spent on utility bills.

In the original evaluation of the current energy efficiency measures, the Construction Industries Division commissioned an engineering cost analysis of the new regulations. This study looked at a typical \$200,000 home. The study found that including the new energy efficiency measures in the construction of the home would add between \$2200 and \$2600 to the final cost of that home. With a 30-year mortgage at 6% interest (high by today's standards), the monthly mortgage payment would cost approximately \$11 to \$14 more. On the other hand, the homeowner could be projected to save from \$24 to \$27 on their monthly utility bills on average. This yields a net savings for homeowners of \$14 per month from the very first month.

A study for commercial buildings yields similar results.

Rolling back efficiency measures is therefore a really bad idea -- bad for the homeowner, and bad for local business. More money spent on utility bills means less money spent in the community on other things.

The Santa Fe Area Homebuilders Association has recognized that this Code is favorable for homeowners and for local business. They strongly support the 2009 New Mexico Energy Conservation Code, as do many other organizations.

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, in Farmington, Roswell, Las Cruces and Albuquerque, with little public notice, the State Construction Industries Commission is holding hearings on whether to retain any or all of the residential and commercial energy efficiency measures in the 2009 New Mexico Energy Conservation Code that were adopted by the Commission last year. It is vital for the people of New Mexico and their future financial well-being that those measures are not weakened. You are invited to attend and express your opinion on these proposed rules changes. If you cannot attend the meeting, you may send your written comments to the Construction Industries Division, 2550 Cerrillos Road, P.O. Box 25101, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504, Attention: Public Comments. FAX (505) 476-4685. All comments must be received no later than 5:00 p.m., June 2, 2011.

In these hard economic times, and with the high costs of energy, it makes even more sense for our hard-working families to keep this Energy Conservation Code in place. The obscuring tactics of the energy corporations should be seen for what they are: smoke and dust.

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